

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Sept. 7, 2011

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State Historical Society book describes six-man football dynasty

PIERRE, S.D.—A new book from the South Dakota State Historical Society, *Six: A Football Coach's Journey to a National Record* by Marc Rasmussen, tells the story of the inspiring life of the coach and players of the record-setting Claremont Honkers, and their games against teams from all over the state.

In 1947, Coach Bill Welsh stepped onto the football field in Claremont. Home of the newborn Claremont Honkers six-man football team, neither the field nor the town had seen a high-school football game of any description for more than 15 years. All that was about to change, and for the next six years the Claremont Honkers walked off that field at the end of each game undefeated, 61 times in a row.

Welsh, who graduated from Aberdeen Central High School and then attended the University of Illinois and Northern State University, overcame many setbacks in his own life, choosing to remain focused on the development and success of his student-athletes throughout his South Dakota Sports Hall of Fame career. That career was a testament to the strong, rural South Dakota values he possessed and to his belief that young men and women had much to offer the community in which they lived.

At the time of Claremont's dominance, more than 100 schools in the state played the game. As school consolidation changed the fabric of high-school sports, eight-man and then nine-man football supplanted the six-man variant, but for a while, it reigned supreme. For small communities across the region, six-man football provided a way in which to engage with a popular sport, a dynamic and high-scoring sporting event, and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of community spirit.

Rasmussen has captured the power and charisma of Bill Welsh, the delight of the players and townspeople as the team continued its success, and the importance of high-school sports in rural communities across the country. By telling Welsh's and Claremont's story, Rasmussen has opened a window to the past and into the lives of rural communities in the 1940s and 1950s.

Six is available for \$16.95 (plus shipping and tax where applicable) and can be purchased from most bookstores or ordered directly from the South Dakota State Historical Society Press. For more information, visit www.sdshspress.com or call (605) 773-6009.

The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council, and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society's world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.